



Carl Beech's Trail of Destructive Deception: the Far Reaches of the Spectrum of Lying

Robert M Kaplan

Forensic Psychiatrist, Clinical Associate Professor, Graduate School of Medicine, University of Wollongong

***Corresponding Author:** *Robert M Kaplan, Forensic Psychiatrist, Clinical Associate Professor, School of Medicine, Western Sydney University*

Abstract: *The revelations of Carl Beech in 2014 of a massive sexual abuse conspiracy involving leading members of the British establishment triggered a huge police inquiry and caused lasting damage to the reputations of several leading figures.*

Beech's claims, it turned out, were all fabrications and subsequent investigations showed the police in a poor light by uncritically accepting the allegations. Beech was found to be engaged in paedophile activities and, after going on the run, was sentenced to 18 years in prison.

The case provides an opportunity to examine the classification of extreme lying and its manifestations.

While pathological lying is usually regarded as a form of behaviour or a symptom of underlying psychopathology, a case is made for it to be regarded as a disorder in its own right.

In 2014, Carl Beech, an NHS manager and nurse, wrote a blog detailing horrific abuse, including rape, torture and witnessing three murders, that he had suffered or witnessed in the 1970s and 1980s. These extreme paedophile activities, Beech alleged, were facilitated by an underground network. What followed was nothing less than a catastrophe.

Beech claimed his stepfather Raymond had sexually abused him, taking him to parties at exclusive private clubs, Dolphin Square in London, and other locations for further abuse by prominent British establishment figures including Sir Edward Heath, former home secretary Leon Brittan, Field Marshal Lord Bramall, ex-MI5 chief Sir Michael Hanley, Tory MP Harvey Proctor, Lord Janner, Sir Maurice Oldfield and (unsurprisingly) Jimmy Saville. Another high-profile target of the accusations was Sir Cliff Richard.

The allegations caused an uproar with sensational media headlines that led to the police making widely publicised investigations. The accusations caused enormous ructions, in addition to lasting damage to reputations; former Home Secretary Leon Brittan, for example, died with the charges hanging over him.¹

The police response? Operation Midland, a 15-month investigation with dawn raids on homes of the accused, cost £2.4 million – and closed in 2016 without a single arrest.

An indication how the investigators who uncritically accepted the claims neglected the most basic tenets of objectivity is shown by the response of Beech's ex-wife Dawn, who was not interviewed by the police during the investigation. On first hearing his allegations, "I thought, What? What? Really? Really? Really?! Come on. You just think – what the actual f**k is that about?"

In retrospect, it stretches the imagination that the authorities could so simply slide into gullible acceptance of Beech's gallimaufry of claims. Professional training to reach objective conclusions based on the facts – standard operating police procedure – simply went out of the window, such was the enthusiasm for pursuing the largest fish in the establishment. As psychiatrist Harold Merskey said, when the critical faculties are only slightly loosened, there is no end to the cascade that follows.²

But Beech's story continued to expand until it reached a critical mass, becoming untenable, and his claims fell to pieces. It was all a complete fabrication.

By the time the conspiracy collapsed, huge amounts of money had been wasted and the reputation of the police was permanently damaged. They were shown to be both reckless and incompetent in pursuing the accusations without checking Beech's facts, to say nothing of facilitating the media storm. Their gullibility and incompetence was further compromised when it turned out there was an overlapping investigation by another police unit and Beech later shown to be engaged in paedophile activities.

His hecatomb of lies collapsing around him, Beech went on the run in Sweden, was duly captured and charged with fraud. He was found guilty on 12 counts of perverting the course of justice for falsely accusing public figures sexual crimes against boys and murder, in addition to his own child sex offences. In July 2020 he received an 18-year sentence.³

A lie of sufficient size assumes the dimensions of an octopus with a central body and limbs extending in every direction. For every big lie those who take it up become liars themselves; either by overcoming their reservations to make themselves believe the lie or to further their own agendas. The most egregious example of fanning the flames came from Tom Watson, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and Shadow Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. ⁴In 2012 Watson said in Parliament that there was "clear intelligence suggesting a powerful paedophile network linked to parliament and Number 10".⁵ After Lord Brittan's death he was to write that he "stands accused of multiple child rape", adding that he believed the people he had spoken to were sincere. ⁶It took until 2019 for Watson to issue a rather grudging apology of dubious sincerity.⁷

Carl Beech's personality and motives is a matter to be examined elsewhere; that he engaged in paedophilic activities himself must be a key issue in understanding what he did. What the story raises for examination is the pathology of extreme lying.

Lying is a natural process with obvious survival value used throughout the animal kingdom to serve self-protective or aggressive functions. Many definitions of the lie have been proposed, but there is a consensus that the essential elements include a consciousness of falsity and a preconceived goal or purpose.

It is accepted that lying lies along a spectrum, starting with 'everyday' or 'normal' lying which can occur in any circumstances for a range of reasons that include avoiding responsibility for misdeeds. Lies are distinguished on the basis of motive, malignancy, and degree of pathology. Typical motives for telling a lie may include (1) self-enhancement or glorification, (2) economic motives, (3) sexual motives, or (4) political motives.

A distinction needs to be made between lying and confabulation, a psychiatric symptom described as the production or creation of false or erroneous memories without the intent to deceive (sometimes called "honest lying").⁸ Confabulation occurs in conditions like Korsakoff Syndrome, Alzheimer's Disease, frontal lobe disorder and delusional states.⁹

Further along the spectrum is compulsive or pathological lying. First described by Anton Delbruck who observed that some of his patients told lies that were so abnormal and out of proportion that they deserved a special category.¹⁰

Over a century ago, in a classic paper, Healy & Healy defined the pathological liar as demonstrating falsification disproportionate to practical gain, often extensive and complicated, manifesting over several years or even a lifetime. ¹¹It includes a group of people who lie for the sake of lying and who "take delight in the producing of fictive tales in itself" in a manner seemingly out of their control. The mistruths are not just widespread but are used to justify and explain every aspect of a life and have a seemingly uncontrollable aspect to the user.

At the distal end of the spectrum of lying is *Pseudologia Fantastica* (PF) perpetuated by a *pseudolouge*, also known as *mythomania*. PF involves elaborate stories that have a small but recognisable connection with reality. When King and Ford reviewer of PF in 1988¹², it was the first paper on the topic in 50 years.¹³

Dupre described three criteria for PF: (1) the story must be probable and keep a certain reference to reality, (2) the imaginary adventures must manifest in multiple circumstances and in a durable

manner, and (3) the themes of these "adventures" are varied but the hero or victim is almost always the subject.¹⁴ The stories are not used for personal profit, and a proper distinction is not made between fiction and reality.

PF is typified by these characteristics: (1) the stories are not entirely improbable and are often built upon a matrix of truth; (2) the stories are enduring; (3) the stories are not told for personal profit *per se* and have a self-aggrandizing quality; and (4) they are distinct from delusions in that the person when confronted with facts can acknowledge these falsehoods.

The pseudolouge is equally represented in males and females. Intelligence varies, but at least 40% have evidence of central nervous system dysfunction.

PF reached widespread attention in the famous paper by Richard Asher in 1951 describing Munchausen's Syndrome.¹⁵ Peregrinating young males who faked medical symptoms to gain admission to hospital would explain their situation with elaborate lies that had a doubtful connection with reality but were intended to engage the sympathy of the listener to avoid questioning of their credibility.

Munchausen's Syndrome has acquired names such as "peregrinating problem patients," "hospital hoboos," "hospital vagrants," "hospital addicts," and subcategories (based on presenting symptoms) like "haemorrhagica histrionica," "laperotomophiliamigrans," "neurologica diabolica," "hyperpyrexia figmentatica," and "dermatitis autogenica."¹⁶ These exotic terms show the difficulty locating the condition in the medical model.

The distortion of truth is not limited to the history or illness symptoms and pseudolouges often give themselves important academic or political titles. Colourful activities or dramatic roles such as deep-sea diver, fighter pilot, professional athlete or war heroes will add to the illusion. A more recent variation, fostered by the wellness industry on the internet, is cancer survivor, among whom Belle Gibson is a prominent fake.

Stories of falsely elaborate systems and histories are intended to intrigue the listener, thus reinforcing the issue they are promoting.

What is characteristic is the absence of a discernible motive. On the surface it may be hospital admission, financial gain or avoidance of penalties like prison, but the real issue has to lie deeper. What the pseudolouge ultimately seeks almost invariably turns out to their disadvantage. If this is thought to lie in the unconscious, the problem with determination of unconscious motives is that, despite the best of efforts, they will always remain speculative.

These forms of extreme lying have acquired different labels, including Ganser syndrome, compulsive lying or deception syndrome. Ganser syndrome involves approximate answers and seems rather old-fashioned, having originated in German jails.¹⁷

Psychiatric literature attributes this type of lying to conditions like intellectual handicap, personality disorder and psychosis. But this is unsatisfactory and lacks much explanatory capacity. While PF cases can appear to have a motive, this is always murky and does not explain much.

For many the lying is a secondary manifestation of personality disorder. But this has poorly defined criteria with low reliability and validity. Mostly, the concept does not provide any insight into the motivation.

Extreme liars may well have these conditions but it does not explain why these people go to such extremes which, in most cases, end up adversely for them.

What has not been considered is whether such lying is not a *result* of other psychiatric disorders, but a *pathology* in its own right. The argument made against classifying extreme lying as a formal psychiatric disorder is that it is a *behaviour*, rather than a condition that meets the criteria for a disorder. Countering these objections, compulsive gambling, kleptomania, internet and pornographic addiction are behavioural pathologies that can have severe consequences and recognised as psychiatric disorders.

The pathology of lying is a neglected area of study that deserves more attention. The consequences, as the Beech case indicates, can be severe. If his ostensible motives were to obtain reward, attention and portray himself as a crusader against paedophile abuse, does that tell us what really drove him? Despite holding a responsible position in the NHS, Beech had a long record of pointless lying that seemed to have little motive other than to portray himself as a noble victim of illness. Until we have developed a better understanding of MF and all its variations, epigones like Beech will continue to reap havoc.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Robert M Kaplan, is a forensic psychiatrist, writer and speaker. He is Clinical Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Medicine, University of Wollongong and the School of Medicine, Western Sydney University; Conjoint Lecturer, University of New South Wales; and Research Fellow, History Department Stellenbosch University.

His latest book *The King who Strangled his Psychiatrist and Other Dark Tales* is seeking a publisher.

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